



## **Hospitality and the Homeless: Jacques Derrida in the Neoliberal City**

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### **Abstract:**

Homeless and property-owning persons increasingly encounter one another in city-space. How should we relate to the marginalized other? What spaces should be fashioned for the homeless other? Drawing on ethnographic interviews with social service providers and street-involved adults, plus an array of secondary documents, we engage these ethical and spatial questions. We use Derrida's writing on absolute hospitality to unravel the spatial and racial divisions of the neoliberal city. We highlight how the effects of neoliberalism are differentially spread over city-space and exclude marginalized and racialized persons. Following Derrida, we argue for an ethic of hospitality that unconditionally welcomes the other and creates open spaces for those ravaged by the excesses of neoliberal capitalism. We demonstrate the promise of this ethic through the work of a social service group that closely, but imperfectly, manifests the genre of hospitality we endorse.

Keywords: Derrida, hospitality, ethics, homelessness

### **Hospitality in neoliberal times?**

'Hey Man,' I heard a voice call as I pulled open the door to my local Starbucks Coffee House, 'can you spare some change?' I mentioned to the homeless Aboriginal man that I would be back in a few minutes. After making my purchase I returned only to be greeted by a troubling sight. A middle-aged woman holding a \$5.00 Venti Mochachino was berating the homeless man. She scolded him to get a 'fucking job' and 'go back to where he came from.' I sidled up to the man, provided him with an all-too-meager sum and expressed how sorry I was that he experienced such abuse. He looked at me with saddened eyes and apprised me not to worry since 'it happens all the time.'

In geographies where the beacons of the neoliberal economy spend and earn the homeless are unwelcome. Marginalized populations who are set apart by their economic destitution and inability to participate fully in the capitalist order are excluded and slotted into debauched and dissolute spaces. Blots on the otherwise serene and tranquil city they are shooed and shunted into spaces few elites would dare travel or, for that matter, call home. They are often treated like pestilence by local residents and are commonly seen as teetering on the precipice of criminality. Governments, for their part, discursively constitute this other as gorging themselves on the public coffers. Disdain and contempt greet the other (like the homeless man in the story above) who dares traverse the imaginary but all-too-real inner city border.

Encounters with strangers - the foreigner, the homeless, the refugee, the tourist - raise an important ethical question: How should we relate to the other? Scholars have begun to address this question via Jacques Derrida's (2005, 2002, 1999; Derrida & Duformantelle, 2000) writing on absolute hospitality (Caputo, 1997; Dikeç, Clark, & Barnett, 2009; George, 2009; Shryock, 2009; Wyschogrod, 2003). Historically, hospitality has been a dominant lens through which to conceptualize how we ought to address and be with the

other. Obligations to host the stranger were significant themes in Greek and Roman mythology and remain central to many religious parables (George, 2009; O’Gorman, 2007). Although the importance of hospitality as a social obligation and moral norm waned over the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lashley, Lynch & Morrison, 2007b), new global population flows brought about by neoliberalism have revived interest in this concept. While scholars have adapted Derridian-inspired readings of hospitality to globalization or the hospitality industry (Lashley & Morrison, 2001; Lashley, Lynch & Morrison, 2007a; Lugosi, 2009; Molz & Gibson, 2007), very few have extended this understanding to inner city relations. We use Derrida’s understanding of absolute hospitality to unravel the spatial and racial divisions neoliberalism imparts on cities. Following Derrida, we argue for an ethic of hospitality that unconditionally, and impossibly, welcomes the other and ameliorates the suffering of populations ravaged by the excesses of neoliberal capitalism.

This paper emerges out of our study of urban marginality in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Given its intimate ties to world energy markets, Edmonton is a city tightly integrated into the processes of neoliberal globalization. Nevertheless, the conclusions we reach hold relevance well beyond Edmonton’s geographical borders. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with social service providers and street-involved adults, news reports, municipal census data, homeless counts, and budgetary analyses, this article highlights the contemporary currents of neoliberalism that intrude deeply into the lives of the homeless and marginalized other. After a brief overview of Derrida’s understanding of absolute hospitality, we review the contemporary neoliberal climate and examine how its effects are differentially spread throughout the spaces of the city. We conclude by illustrating how one social service group, the St. Michael’s Society, closely, but imperfectly, manifests the genre of hospitality we endorse.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To safeguard anonymity all names of persons, places and organizations have been changed.

### **Without asking for reciprocity or their names:<sup>3</sup> Derrida and absolute hospitality**

Derrida's writing on hospitality emerged largely from his close reading of Emmanuel Levinas' remarkable discussions of how we ought to *be* with the Other. Hospitality, whether conditional or absolute, originates in encounters with an Other who appears at our threshold. In a parenthetical aside to his discussion of Socrates apology to his Athenian accusers, Derrida underscores the heart of hospitality. Because Socrates does not speak the court's language and is a foreigner to its customs he requests concession:

He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State...This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that is the first act of violence. That is where the question of hospitality begins (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, 15).

George Pavlich (2005, 104) suggests that hospitality is rooted in the Latin word '*hospitale* connoting 'of a guest', and from *hospitare*, 'to receive as a guest'.' At its base, hospitality concerns how guests are welcomed into spaces governed and controlled by a sovereign. As with the case of Socrates, laws and customs are imposed from above (most often) on marginalized others irrespective of their origin, heritage or enculturation. Demanding conformity to alien conventions closes down the other's otherness and shapes negotiations between the sovereign and subject whereby the latter is impelled to act according to foreign codes of conduct. According to Derrida, the court engages in violence by demanding that Socrates address them in a foreign language and conduct himself according to strange customs.

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, 25.

Questions of hospitality and how we ought to be with the other are sparked wherever host and guest converge. Mobilizing absolute hospitality as the basis for propositions about how we might think otherwise about encounters with the marginalized (like the one discussed at the beginning of this paper) facilitates a critique of contemporary ways of being with those frequently left behind by capitalist expansion. Opening up our thinking about the other through the lens of absolute hospitality might encourage more ethical and just ways of being with and relating to strangers who approach our thresholds. For Derrida (2000, 25) this means breaking with hospitality in its usual sense of a conditional welcome of the other.

An inalienable tension between a welcome of, and hostility to, the stranger is obscured in contemporary and everyday usage of hospitality (Caputo, 1997; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Pavlich, 2002). Welcoming the foreigner always already assumes another. Fashioning the other as 'other' in the instance of the welcome sets in motion and entrenches relations of dominion over space. Anyone who has hosted particularly odious houseguests can begin to understand the duality endemic to hospitality. Visitors who overstep established but unstated boundaries of decency raise the host's ire. We often say to those who cross our threshold, 'welcome, make yourself at home.' Hosts typically do not want their guests to take this offer seriously. Most would be appalled to find their guests rooting through their underwear drawers or helping themselves to all the food in their refrigerators without expressed permission. Any welcome of a guest into a host's home is, therefore, conditional. The 'make yourself at home' is not to be taken literally (Pavlich, 2005). Instead, it means please feel comfortable in *my* space, but remember I am the owner and you are to respect this fact. Tension is endemic and intrinsic to conditional hospitality, which 'preserves the distance between one's self and the stranger, between owning one's own property and inviting the other into one's home' (Caputo, 1997, p. 110).

Marginalized populations seek social service assistance and are a common feature of the urban landscape in disordered city spaces. However, even here they rarely enjoy courtesy or cordiality. As a result of increased demand and state regulation of the non-profit sector, persons in need of free meals must now line up outside drop-in centres and community kitchens to await open seats. Once space permits they can enter only so far as the supervisory desk located immediately inside the front door where they are obliged to sign-in. In addition to keeping track of the number of visitors as justification to donors and government funders for their existence, this meeting of the other at the threshold allows supervisors to prevent intoxicated or potentially disruptive persons from accessing services. Negotiating access to the centre enables the host supervisors to render judgment about the guest's worthiness. Those in need who seek welcome find this brand of bureaucratic and security screening degrading. Jim, a middle aged man we met on the street, explained the situation he encountered at an inner city drop-in centre in these terms:

They only allow so many people in their building and you got to sit outside like a dog, waiting until somebody leaves and they let two more in, two leave, two in. I have been down there to try and get a lunch, well lunch is over by the time I get through the door... [It used to be that] they opened the door and they let people come in and eat. Now it is like you stand there waiting ... It is just a pile of shit.

In the contemporary ethos, bureaucratic and security demands frequently trump open, hospitable and ethical being with others. Instead of an unconditional welcome of the other who appears at the threshold, entry rituals intended to police the homeless close down and exclude.

Guests fortunate enough to access inner city agencies and shelters often find their welcome subject to strict behavioural regulations. Homeless persons complained to us that

their stay in shelters or subsidized housing was subject to their adherence to rules that included such strict and repugnant ordinances as, restrictions on when they could leave or enter their units, agreements to attend counseling, concession to allow supervisors to read their mail, and prohibitions on visits from family and friends. Lines between host and guest are clearly demarcated. Tensions between the marginalized other and those empowered by the state to oversee housing programs are palpable in the following exchange:

Interviewer: Let us keep talking about the housing program first. You said you are on probation? What does that mean? What do you have to do to have a good probation so that you make it through?

Arlene: Um, can't have company, parties.

Interviewer: No company. So [boyfriend of 10 years] can't stay there?

Arlene: No

Interviewer: And are they watching all the time?

Arlene: Yeah.....

In severe cases guests have been formally evicted from shelters or subsidized units for refusing to, or an inability to, follow the host's rules. A homeless man in his 50s explained to us that he found himself back on the streets after being evicted from a shelter for using the payphone too frequently. Another homeless man who had successfully secured subsidized housing nonetheless was evicted because the agency running the program prohibited his homeless girlfriend from staying at his unit.

Strict behavioural edicts and tight surveillance markedly diverge from the open welcome invoked by Derrida's understanding of absolute hospitality. He suggests that

instead of violence and shutting down upon the other who approaches, we might instead open out and extend to them an unconditional welcome. Derrida writes:

[A]bsolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, ... but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, 25 *emphasis in the original*)

Derrida's vision might prove difficult in contemporary neoliberal times where the boundaries that separate the marginalized other from the moneyed classes are increasingly rigid and where the pre-requisite for entry to receive even the most basic human need is providing one's name. That the neoliberal ethos has dealt the poor and marginalized a tragic hand and that there might be resistance to their open reception is all the more reason to insist on absolute hospitality. Such an ethic demands pushing beyond imposed limits that manifest tensions between visitor and owner, stranger and host, poor and affluent. Undertaking practices and projects that take hospitality seriously are no doubt onerous, complex and perhaps even dangerous. However, even if unconditional hospitality is seemingly impossible or beyond contemporary ontological limits, we must push beyond these imposed boundaries toward a welcome of the other without reservation or calculation. We must strive for 'an unlimited display of hospitality to the new arrival' (Derrida, 2005, 66).

In an ethos where neoliberal rationalities and practices shunt the homeless other into marginalized and dissolute spaces, the question of hospitality to and for the marginalized other is urgent: the violent exclusion of others gravely concerns life and death. Spaces of welcome and a corresponding ethic of absolute hospitality for marginalized populations is

critical – for their survival, for their shelter, for their well-being, and for their dignity. Before moving to a discussion of the promise of unconditional hospitality, we detail how the marginalized other has been concentrated in disadvantaged and often destitute inner city space.

### **Boyle/McCauley: The ‘Black Triangle’**

When traditional modes of governance (e.g. prisons, law, courts, and police) are inadequate to the task of managing the other, shunting the marginalized into spaces of exclusion – in the city’s least desirable locations, of course – is the best municipal and provincial officials can imagine. Run down and abandoned areas have become the default sites for the problems of capitalism and the spaces where city officials have slotted increasing number of socialized housing units. Subsidized housing is concentrated in the inner city where such projects are less likely to be on the receiving end of severe and sustained backlash.

Edmonton’s McCauley-Boyle region is among the city’s poorest and hosts the vast majority of its homeless and marginalized. According to the 2001 federal census the average annual income city-wide was \$57,360. By contrast, average incomes in McCauley and Boyle were \$29,849 and \$25,931, or about half of the municipal average (City of Edmonton, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Longstanding criminological research confirms how impoverished and economically depressed city spaces witness disproportionate levels of criminality and disorder (cf. Shaw & McKay, 1942). McCauley and Boyle follow a predictable pattern. In 2005 violent crimes rates for these communities were almost 4 times the Edmonton average (11/1000 compared to 42/1000 in Boyle and 46/1000 in McCauley). Similarly, property crime rates were grossly higher in these areas (City of Edmonton, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

Rapid demographic shifts within McCauley-Boyle further demonstrate that this geography has been designated as the site for concentrating the dispossessed. While the population of Edmonton grew nearly 10% between 1995 and 2005, residents living in market-housing in the McCauley-Boyle area declined. This is not to imply that this space failed to grow during the decade. Rather, population growth was almost entirely the result of increasing numbers of persons making shelters and subsidized housing their primary residence. While there was a 61% expansion in the number of persons city-wide who claimed group centres as their primary residence, McCauley and Boyle saw disproportionately higher rates (104% and 122%) (City of Edmonton, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Because of the concentration of social services, homelessness, and crime, the region has achieved an unenviable stigma. An Edmonton realtor has gone so far as to dub the area 'the black triangle of East Edmonton' (Davies, 2008).

Concentrating social services (e.g. food and shelter) that provide for the basic needs of the homeless and marginalized other in the singular space of McCauley-Boyle fabricates this space into a de facto prison (Wacquant, 2008). Social services secure the homeless other in outcast stretches of the inner city that are far removed from the consumer spaces and homes of the affluent. There are no walls surrounding this space and few guards posted on the borders, yet the other is nonetheless confined 'in their place.'

In addition to being moored to inner city space by proximity to social services, xenophobia anchors the other in space. When venturing beyond inner city borders the homeless experience heightened visibility and corresponding attempts to shoulder them back into the city's dispossessed areas. Countless marginalized others we have met recount tales of police escorting them back to the inner city after they were found in *foreign* space. Police are not the only wardens of the inner city and its marginalized others. A middle-aged homeless man told us the following,

I ended up by the zoo one time, I was lost. I was passing back and forth by this one house for a couple hours – it is a rich area of the city. A guy comes out and asks what I am up to. I say that I am trying to find a place to sleep. He tells me, 'well you are in the wrong part of town.' Then he offers me a ride to a shelter. I figure I better take it. I have no idea where I am. On the way he stops at a bank, fills an envelope, and gives it to me. He tells me not to open it till tomorrow and not to open it in front of anyone. Well I forgot all about it. I find it and open it the next day. What is inside? One hundred dollars! How nice is that? I couldn't believe it.

The generosity of the resident aside, the story shows how the marginalized other is quickly identified and deemed 'in the wrong part of town'. Affluent residents might be willing to shell out money to their local charity, donate to the food bank or even offer a ride back 'home', but they are not prepared to welcome marginalized others into *their* communities and homes.

A middle age street-involved man explained to us that while people are generally willing to be friendly and give him money, they are not for a moment as charitable about inviting him into their homes. Instead, he was under the distinct impression that they prefer he remain in Edmonton's black triangle and far removed from the centres of affluence. He states:

Like I used to have this friend who has since moved....She would go in the liquor store and hand me a twoonie [a \$2 coin]. I got pictures of her dogs at home and so forth. We always had a good communication. But like I said to you, nobody invites you for supper. That is the one funny thing about the whole place I guess.

Quickly identified as not belonging in spaces inhabited by the affluent the other is intensely watched and swiftly escorted away or collegially met on the doorstep but never welcomed inside.

Surveillance and control are heightened when it involves racialized others (Razack, 2002). In particular, Aboriginal peoples travelling outside of the inner city often find their movement restricted and obstructed. For example, an Aboriginal participant in research conducted by Bonar Buffam (2006) was loading his van with sound equipment after a hip-hop performance in a nightclub on Edmonton's trendy Whyte Avenue – a space occupied by mostly white university students – when a pair of police officers accused him of theft. On what basis did the police make their accusation? The respondent replied, 'I guess it was just too hard for the police to believe that people like *us* would have *that* equipment in *that* part of town' (Buffam, 2006, 59 *emphasis in the original*).

Similarly, our research suggests that Aboriginal homeless persons are more readily escorted out of the Whyte Avenue commercial district and into the social service region of McCauley-Boyle. Compare the following two stories that are representative of the differential treatment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons by police in the area. The first involves a Caucasian homeless man whom the police allow to stay in the area:

I said [to the officers waking him up in an alley behind Whyte Avenue], 'guys give me a break, at least let me sleep a couple hours'. He said, 'I would if I could, but I can't. If we get a complaint, it goes on our system, we have to do something about it and chase you out.' He says, 'I will tell you what though, between you and me, go a couple blocks that way away from Whyte and find a place to go to sleep.'

The second concerns an Aboriginal man who tries to occupy the same space:

I went to Whyte Avenue. I was panhandling. And they [the police] say, 'you panhandling?' I said, 'no.' They say, 'what are you doing here? You can't be sitting around here. You know what, we think you are panhandling.' And, they say, 'where are you from?' I say, 'I am homeless.' They say, 'well we are going to drive you to the Hope Mission and we think you are panhandling, but we have no proof. But we think you are and you can't lie to us, so we are going to drive you downtown.'

The white homeless man described his encounter with police as friendly, helpful, and non-violent. Because he felt the social service region presented danger to him he was grateful not to be transported. His police encounters and perceptions of the McCauley-Boyle area were typical of the Caucasian homeless persons with whom we spoke on Whyte Avenue. This demographic was less frequently escorted to the McCauley-Boyle region against their will. The Aboriginal homeless person, by contrast, was immediately picked up and dropped off in the 'black triangle'. Tragically, this was an all too common experience for Aboriginal homeless people with whom we spoke. They were more frequently escorted off Whyte Avenue and deposited in the social service region of McCauley-Boyle, even if they too preferred not to go and perceived it as dangerous.

Aboriginality is a signifier of potential disorder that anchors this population in disorganized and dangerous spaces. It is not only state control agents who operate according to such markers of dangerousness. Buffam (2006, 61) relates that on more than one occasion Caucasian bus drivers in Edmonton would loudly instruct an Aboriginal person waiting for her/his bus that 'we can't have you coming on.' The drivers later rationalized their actions by claiming they 'were not judging, we just can't have *that* coming onto the bus' (Buffam 2006, 61 *emphasis in original*). This inhospitality to the other fixes Aboriginal peoples in spaces famous for economies of crime and vice. While Edmonton's poor treatment of Aboriginal peoples is certainly not unique, the city is gaining an intolerant

reputation. A recent Environics Institute (2010) study of Canada's major urban centres found that Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton were the most likely to feel negatively perceived by the non-Aboriginal population.

Although the fall-out from neoliberal re-structuring is felt in the greatest measure in Edmonton's inner city neighbourhoods, even in these outcast spaces, the marginalized other is considered and treated as undesirable. Many McCauley-Boyle homeowners look with disdain upon the other as a symbol of all that is wrong with their community and employ both formal and informal means to try and eject this disagreeable guest from their midst. For example, residents who have purchased their homes in McCauley have used their cultural and political capital to demand that city council put 'a stop to additional [socialized housing] in their communities' (Kent, 2010, B3). On several occasions the McCauley Community League has employed the resources of the court to block proposed social services from coming into the community and has called for an 'an immediate moratorium on all subsidized housing in the community' (Kent, 2010, B3). Community members complain that the overconcentration of social services and subsidized housing encourages increased levels of disorder and, thus, disrupts their revitalization and gentrification efforts.

### **St. Michael's: Hospitality to/for the other**

*I think that the biggest challenge is just energy and spirit: spirit big enough to continue taking on and taking in -- Mark, Executive Director, St. Michael's Society of Edmonton.*

In an ethos of violent exclusion of the other how can social service agencies, communities, and cities welcome the other? How should they receive the stranger who appears at their

door asking for assistance? Given the increasing numbers of homeless peoples brought about by neoliberal expansion and the overrepresentation of the indigenous other among them, the question is pressing. In a land and place of opulence for the rich, the poor are literally dying on city streets. From 2007 through 2010, at least 194 homeless peoples died on Edmonton's city streets (Sands, 2008; Drake, 2009; Brooymans, 2010; Liewicki, 2011). Many of these individuals lost their lives simply because they were unable to meet their basic needs (Brooymans, 2010).

Instead of casting the other aside, or seeing the marginalized as an odious guest, there is an Edmonton group who welcomes the marginalized not only into their space of work but into their homes. In the spirit of absolute hospitality they do not ask for names or require guests to record themselves for later tabulation into a form that satisfies neoliberal standards of accountability. Hidden in the neighbourhood of McCauley, the St. Michael's Society attempts, in the words of its Executive Director, to create a 'place of welcome' where the homeless other is invited to 'just come in.' Because the people of St. Michael's live at the centre, marginalized groups who arrive at their threshold requesting help and assistance are literally being received into their home. Mark explains 'this is our home. So when people come to receive some help, in food or clothing or whatever—they're coming to our home.'

Visitors are greeted by a garden complete with roses, rhododendrons and mature trees. The 14 permanent residents who come from all walks of life to call the centre home conscientiously tend not only to the garden, but to the needs of the homeless and marginalized. The two-story building, which is orderly and well-kept, is surrounded by dilapidated and run-down properties that, in their neglect, have become crack houses and homes to squatters. A weapons shop is their only immediate neighbour. In the midst of the outcast spaces of the inner city St. Michael's is, nevertheless, a space of welcome. It is an

oasis in an otherwise violent world. This is no accident. Residents take tremendous pride in the building and the services they provide to Edmonton's most vulnerable. When asked about this aesthetically pleasing exterior the Executive Director replied, 'we try to have a place of beauty, *hospitality*, and care' and aim to 'create sanctuary and shelter from the inner city's violence and cruelty' (*emphasis added*).

Everyday at 8:00 a.m. the residents and volunteers of St. Michael's arrive at the kitchen to prepare the meals that will be served to Edmonton's needy. They busy themselves in their rather modest kitchen cutting up fresh organic vegetables donated by a local business and chickens provided by a nearby farm. All is prepared in anticipation of the other's arrival. On average 300 souls appear at St. Michael's door everyday for a scheduled lunch that is served between 11:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.. But an open hospitality, the kind that creates spaces of welcome, is not only available at designated intervals. Rather, it is ready to receive the other at all times. St. Michael's recognizes that hospitality waits for the other's arrival and that residents should prepare themselves thus. Toward this end, they ready snack bags containing two sandwiches and a bottle of water for anyone who appears at their threshold in need. While we were collecting interviews at the centre, the doorbell rang on five separate occasions. Each time a resident greeted the needy person without an air of 'I must' but rather with an air of delight that she/he could be of assistance.

Derrida maintains that hospitality is an 'attitude of utter openness and a readiness to give, unconditionally of all my possessions to the stranger knocking at my door' (Boersma, 2004, 30). How many among us would be prepared to follow such dictates? Indeed, providing meals to the homeless is one thing, handing over one's clothes and possessions is another matter entirely. Mark and the others who call St. Michael's home live and subsist almost entirely on donated food and clothes. Nevertheless, every week they open their clothes room to the homeless and needy who are encouraged to take whatever they

require. St. Michael's residents are quite literally urging the other to come in and make themselves at home by offering the clothes off their backs and food out of their refrigerator.

Contrary to Western cultural values that privilege private ownership and closure around personal space, St. Michael's residents are both happy to open their homes to the other and inspired by the effort. This is the brand of open hospitality to the other that we encourage, one that begins free of an 'I must.' It is a welcome unfettered by drudgery and full of respect for the other who is encountered at the threshold. While other Edmontonians snub the inner city Mark counters that:

This is the best neighborhood in the city....Yeah, because you walk down the street and people say hello. People look at you. They may be drunk, they may be stoned, they may be mentally ill, but the people who come in here and live around here, you know, they're not hiding. You walk on Jasper Avenue [part of Edmonton's affluent downtown] and nobody looks at you. People are just afraid of each other.

There is an openness to and from the other that comforts Mark. For him, it is not simply a case of St. Michael's giving without receiving. He maintains that instead of closing ourselves off to the marginalized other and considering them a drain on our precious resources, we should rather be open to them and respect what they give us despite their lack of material possessions. Mark says:

And so opening yourself up, to keep opening yourself big enough to receive this new person, and to discover them and let them discover you, and find a way to live and share this life together, has an impact on how I live with the guests and with the folks who come to our door in need. And then they have an effect on how I live with the people in my own family. So it's this back and forth thing.

For Mark, being with the other includes creating open spaces of welcome to the point that who gives and who receives, who hosts and who visits, is blurred. Absolute hospitality transforms both host and guest, both privileged and marginalized (Derrida & Duformantelle, 2000).

The St. Michael's residents are committed to being open and receiving the other into their home by welcoming them out of an often violent world. Mark says, 'we try as much as possible here. I mean we have boundaries, but we try as much as possible.' Indeed, Mark was very much aware that while he would like to keep the entirety of St. Michael's open and free for all to enjoy and experience, limits (albeit minimal) are placed on the organization's hospitality. Although intoxicated individuals are welcomed, violence is not. Mark explained that because they cater to 'a large male population there is jostling, but no meanness. I've been here twelve years and I think we've called the police three times. That's not much.'

Unlike many other social service agencies that are structurally dependent on government funds and therefore have their responses to the other determined by corresponding state-determined measures of accountability and efficiency, St. Michael's hospitality is not limited or conditional upon filling out forms or providing one's name. Derrida (2005, 67) explains that hospitality 'consists in welcoming the new arrival before imposing conditions on them, before knowing and asking for anything at all, be it a name or an identity paper.' For Mark providing information about oneself is not a prerequisite to receiving assistance. 'So that when people come in nobody fills out forms. And you don't even have to tell me your name. I've known and know people who have been coming for years whose names I don't know because they have never told me, but that's okay. There is still hospitality and care given.'

No one must be refused. For certain this ethic opens the space to entry of the very worst who may destroy the place (Derrida & Duformantelle, 2000). But that is a situation that must be tolerated when we fashion spaces of welcome for those who inhabit a violent and cruel world. Where are the marginalized other to go? Where are they to receive the necessities of life? St. Michael's does not exclude and recognizes the risks intrinsic to this policy. The *arrivant* may be kind or may conceal injurious intentions, but if we exclude any person who seeks our help there is no hospitality. More than anything else, St. Michael's staff understands the risks intrinsic to hospitality – that the other might take over. This is a risk they accept, but fully comprehend its necessity in helping marginalized populations.

### **Conclusion: Creating spaces of inclusion**

You don't have to do anything, you don't have to earn this meal or do anything to deserve it, either by being poor enough or sick enough or filling out the right paper. Just come to the door and come in -- Mark, Executive Director, St. Michael's Society of Edmonton.

Persons displaced and unsettled by market processes, racism and xenophobia demand justice. In the contemporary ethos marked by bigotry, social welfare retrenchment, and gross overrepresentation of the indigenous other amongst the homeless and prison populations, there is an urgent need to create spaces of welcome. Toward this end, social service agencies and the wider public must adopt a new ethic of hospitality. Absolute hospitality would, as much as possible, unconditionally welcome the other and be less concerned with bureaucracy and accountability than with fashioning open spaces of welcome.

Instead of peering through the peephole at the other who approaches our door, 'let us say *yes to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation,

before any *identification*, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature' (Derrida & Duformantelle, 2000, 77, *emphasis in the original*). This welcome would not ask the other to fully conform to our rules or to our image. We would not turn them away, but would receive them as they are and provide sanctuary in the midst of a violent and inhospitable world.

We recognize the *a priori* limits imposed on hospitality by the host/guest duality. There is simply no way to avoid the fashioning of strangers and the dangers and challenges that these relations pose. Nevertheless, such limits cannot serve as an excuse to irradiate the other or shove them into degenerate space. Rather, the challenge becomes how to negotiate interactions and being with others in ways that are open and ethical (Dikeç, 2002). In contemporary times, there is a pressing need to reflect and challenge processes that (re)produce marginalization and confine the other to closed outcast city-spaces. We must work in the name of justice to bust open padlocked geographies and welcome the marginalized other with reverence and respect for their being. Highlighting the socio-economic and political processes of neoliberalism that perpetuate the other's exclusion is only a beginning. We must also locate, extend and multiply spaces (like St. Michael's) that attempt to break from neoliberal logics and welcome the other through an ethic of open and unconditional hospitality.

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